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PARLIAMENT STREET TORONTO.



A PAPER

READ BY MR. D. B. READ, Q. C., FOR THE REV. DR. SCADDING, AT THE
FEBRUARY MEETING OF THE YORK PIONEER AND
HISTORICAL SOCIETY, 1893.



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All intelligent inhabitants of our cities and towns may be supposed to take peculiar interest in the origin and significance of the names attached to their streets, public squares, and thoroughfares generally. A great deal of the history of every place is wrapped up in such names. It has become quite an established custom of late to commemorate Mayors, Aldermen, Lieutenant Governors, Judges, and other citizens of note by attaching their names to newly laid out streets or avenues, as it is now the fashion often to call them; and doubtless in this way the existence of many a worthy amongst us will be hereafter preserved. In this point of view it will be seen how scrupulous we ought to be, if we have any regard for the past, in not making changes without some very good reason in street names of long standing. The names given to our leading thoroughfares in the old original portions of the city of Toronto indicate a kind of chivalrous devotion to monarchical institutions and the reigning family for the time being. Thus we have King street and Queen street, Adelaide street (after Queen Adelaide), and Victoria street; but Duke street and Duchess street have also their royal significance, though now perchance overlooked—the reference being to the Duke of York (in honor of whom the original town plot was named) and his Duchess, Frederick street at the same time preserving his Christian name, while the next street westward running north and south preserved that of his elder brother, George, as the next street eastward did that of Caroline, spouse of the latter. The following street eastward commemorated the other princes of the royal family without mentioning their names, it being necessary to remark that

the former orthography was *Princes* street and not "Princess" street as now usually given. It should be added, too, that the name Caroline street has only quite recently been expunged from the plans of the city, through the continuation of the name of Sherbourne street from Queen street to the Bay.

It might be imagined perhaps that the name "Parliament street" attached to the important thoroughfare leading now from the neighborhood of Bloor street to the water's edge, in what used to be considered the eastern limit of the city, had its origin in the same feeling of deep respect for constituted authority that had led to the royal titles being given to other great thoroughfares in our midst. It might be supposed that, as in one case devotion to the monarchical principle was indicated, so in the other there was evidence of a wholesome regard for constitutional government by popular representation; but this was *not* the origin of the term "Parliament Street." Long before the cutting up of the eastern portion of the city into town lots, the thoroughfare now known as Parliament Street was nothing more than a kind of irregular road passing down from the direction of Bloor street into the Kingston road; that is to say, into that part of modern King street which is situated one block east of Berkeley street. This irregular road led down southwards towards the site of the early parliament buildings of the province, which stood on a block of ground close to the bay, immediately east of Berkeley street.

Hence, when plans were drawn and lines more formally run, the thoroughfare acquired the style and title of Parliament Street, as a route leading down to the parliament buildings. At the present day when Parlia-

ment Street is fully opened out, and made to pass in a direct line across the Kingston road (or King street), down to the water's edge, the visitor to this part of the city who has the curiosity to pass down through its whole length till it touches the Bay, crossing King St., as aforesaid, and also Front St. in his way, will find himself by the side of the massive and somewhat gloomy pile of buildings known as the Toronto Gas Works. These works, covering more or less the whole block bounded on the north by Front St., on the east by Parliament St., on the south by the Bay and on the west by Berkeley St., occupy the site of the original parliament buildings of Upper Canada with their appurtenances. The site, as will be well remembered by many, was that occupied by the old cut stone county prison with radiating wings, built by Mr. J. G. Howard, and which is now absorbed in the surrounding structure, and utilized in some way by the authorities of the Consumers' Gas Company. "An extraordinary situation for Parliament buildings!" the modern tourist will exclaim, but when the ground was covered with finely grown timber the spot had a noble aspect. The buildings faced westward and commanded a full view of the harbour in that direction. The swamps in the rear were evidently screened off; they are daintily spoken of in early plans as "meadows," "yielding with hay," "natural meadow which may be mowed," etc.

As to the character of the early parliament buildings here erected, they seem to have consisted of two separate edifices or halls, intended at some future time to be united by a larger central structure, of which they would form the wings; but this larger structure was never erected; in the meantime a sort of covered way or colonnade passed from the one to the other. The building, as thus arranged, is marked upon old plans still existing of these parts, and shown also in an early pictorial sketch of

this locality. In December, 1796, when President Russell wrote across from Niagara to York to have the building at the latter place made ready for the opening of the first parliament there, he informs his friend (probably the Hon. John McGill) that the legislature is to meet at York the first of the following June, and therefore that it has become absolutely necessary to make provision for the reception of the members of that body. "You will therefore," he continues, "be pleased to apprise the inhabitants of the town that twenty-five gentlemen will want lodgings and board during the sessions, which may possibly induce them to fit up their houses and lay in provisions to accommodate them." He then refers to the detached wings of the intended government or parliament house just spoken of, and says that these at any rate must be got ready, "the one for the Legislative Council, the other for the Assembly." The bars, tables, and other articles of furniture already in use at Niagara for legislative purposes, he will direct to be sent over. "The house appropriated for the Legislative Council," he adds, "can be occasionally used as a council chamber.

These were the public buildings destroyed by the invaders from the United States in the year 1813, as we learn from the letter of the Rev. Dr. Strachan to ex-President Jefferson printed in the appendix (No. 9, page 368) to the report of the Loyal and Patriotic Society of Upper Canada, published at Montreal by William Gray in 1817. Dr. Strachan's words are these.—"In April, 1813, the public buildings at York, the capital of Upper Canada, were burned by the troops of the United States, contrary to the articles of capitulation. They consisted of two elegant halls with convenient offices for the accommodation of the Legislature and of the Courts of Justice. The library and all the paper and records belonging to these institutions were consumed. At the same time

the church was robbed and the town library totally pillaged." The public buildings thus destroyed were replaced, about the year 1818, by others more extensive, and of a more imposing character, but situated on the same spot: and here the parliament continued to hold its sessions down to the year 1824, when they were again totally destroyed, but this time not by the hand of an invading foe but by a fire originating in an over-heated flue. These buildings I myself well remember, having more than once witnessed the pageantry attendant on the opening of the House by the Lieutenant Governor of the day, Sir Peregrine Maitland, pageantry humble enough no doubt, but then appearing very magnificent. After 1824 the Parliament for many years found a shelter far to the westward of its original home at York; first in the buildings of the General Hospital, situated just west of John street, nearly where the Arlington Hotel now stands; and secondly in the new brick court house west of Church street, immediately across from St. James' Cathedral. Its permanent resting place as then imagined was in the range of buildings on Simcoe Place, expressly for its accommodation, just south from Government House—the building at this moment in the act of being vacated.

We now return to Parliament street in the east. This great thoroughfare is not marked by that name on the earliest plans which we possess. In Mr. Surveyor General D. W. Smith's map (1796) preserved among his papers in the Public Library, Toronto, the route now marked as Parliament street appears as that of an irregular road leading northward. Its chief use seems to have been to conduct the traveller to Castle Frank, and it is somewhat fancifully designated as "Park lane," after which name "to Castle Frank" is added. The surveyor general possessed a lot of land a little way to the westward which he had laid out as an orchard or garden, and on which he had

erected a rather conspicuous residence named by him "Maryville," of which residence there is an elaborate drawing among his papers. On the eastern boundary of his lot he had erected a "porter's lodge," from which a track or roadway is marked in the direction of the route leading to Castle Frank. In a second plan of his representing these parts, we have another route marked out leading obliquely in a north-westerly direction from the road to Castle Frank, and this route is curiously marked "New Road to Niagara." This evidently shows that a track had been opened towards the head of Parliament street, as we should now speak of it, to Yonge street, to where the Davenport Road enters that street from the west. This Davenport Road was the "new road to Niagara," running along at the foot of the Davenport Hill or rise of land, as far as the village of Carleton, where it crosses the road leading to Weston and passes on over the Humber plains directly to the bridge on Dundas street. It is called the new road, in contradistinction to the old route to and from Niagara by the lake shore still travelled, and popularly known as the Lake Shore Road, crossing the Humber at its mouth, a mile or so south of the bridge on Dundas street. This memorandum inscribed by Surveyor General Smith on his early plan is interesting as enabling us to trace the first opening up of the route along Parliament street westerly towards Yonge street. We must remember that the whole space traversed by this newly acquired route was then an almost unbroken forest in a state of nature. This will account for the somewhat rambling character of the track laid down on the surveyor general's plan, which by no means coincides with the long straight lines mathematically drawn from north to south on the plan, indicating the divisions and subdivisions of the large park lots laid out hereabout.

The name "Parliament street" evidently

did not come into general use until some years later. In Wilmot's plan of the survey of these parts, made by order of Governor Gore, in 1810, the route is laid down but not named. In the plans used at the time of the incorporation of the city in 1834 and afterwards, the name Parliament street is fully recognized, as we can see in Cane's plan and Sandford Fleming's a few years later. In the plan which I possess of the Castle Frank property made by Augustus Jones in 1794, the line of road or rather irregular track leading from what we now call Parliament street eastward into the property at its lower end is clearly drawn and colored yellow. This track I well remember, and I could trace out portions of it at the present moment along the steep flank of the hill towards the Don on which the Necropolis Cemetery is situated, and

also along the side of the long slope of the curious hog's-back or hill, on the opposite side of the rivulet known as Castle Frank Brook, which enters the Don here, and which was here crossed by a bridge. The road or bridle path ascended by the side of this long slope, until it reached the plateau at the top where stood the solidly constructed wooden building known as Castle Frank, a few yards beyond the northern limit of St. James' Cemetery. I have often pointed out its exact situation as denoted by a pit where its foundation posts were planted. The whole structure, it may be subjoined, was destroyed by fire in the year 1892. I could also point out at the present moment distinct remains of the bridle path on the steep slope just described, as well as remains of the same path on the hill near the Necropolis.



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